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Diplomacy-by-Generals

If you have wondered about the sounds of saber-rattling emanating from the State Department, I have discovered a possible explanation: the department is being run by generals.

Senators were uneasy over the appointment of a four-star general, Alexander Haig, to head the State Department. He has lived up to their worst fears; he has quietly put military men in charge of diplomacy.

Nowhere is the militarization of the State Department more striking than in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. It's hardly a coincidence that the toughest talk of armed intervention comes from this bailiwick.

On the subject of insurgency below the border, the State Department generals are more militant than the Pentagon generals. Out of the State Department have come hints of gunboat diplomacy. Specifically, the military diplomats want a naval blockade to keep Fidel Castro from smuggling arms into Central America.

The strategists at the Pentagon point out that

the Cubans can fly over the blockade and deliver the arms by plane.

Still the growlings continue to be heard at the State Department, threatening military action or at least CIA-sponsored mischief against undesirable elements in Latin America. Haig has taken a personal part in the get-tough approach. So has his counselor, Robert McFarlane, a retired Marine colonel.

The assistant secretary in charge of the bureau, Thomas Enders, has no military background per se, but the hawks have usually found him cooperative.

Technically reporting to Enders, though a power in his own right, is Gen. Vernon Walters, who holds the rank of ambassador-at-large. He was deputy director of the CIA during the Watergate era and is an old hand at top-level bureaucratic infighting.

But the most interesting brass hat helping to formulate Latin American policy in Foggy Bottom is Lt. Gen. Gordon Sumner. What makes his

appointment fascinating is that Sumner is an outspoken ultraconservative and used to chair the right-wing Council for Inter-American Security.

Sumner holds the personal rank of ambassador, but unlike others in that exalted category, the general has not been required to get Senate confirmation. The reason, the State Department explains, is that his ambassador's title, which he has used on trips to Latin America, is only "temporary"—and has been for months.

It is Sumner's affiliation with the Council for Inter-American Security that is most troubling. The council is so conservative and jingoistic that it is considered President Reagan's tough-talking policy toward Latin America too soft.

By bringing military men into so many important positions in his department, the secretary of state has given legitimate cause for alarm.

"You have a large military presence at State, and as a result, you get a lot of military solutions," explained a former high official.

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